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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ $11 Billion Spam Fine! ~ Online Shopping High! ~ Opera To Expand!
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Happy New Year 2006! Here we are at the beginning of a new year. Hopefully, we all will have a healthy and prosperous one. We had a quiet New Year's celebration. My wife played some video games on her PS2, and I had a few drinks, listened to some music, and watched some of the Three Stooges marathon. Naturally, I watched the ball drop in Times Square, and then back to the tunes! Very quiet, as usual. So, let's start the new year off - regardless of this cold and snowy start - with a quick start. We're enjoying the beginning of our eighth year publishing A-ONE. I still can't believe that we're still here, putting out our magazine week after week. It may be partly due to our enjoyment and dedication, but mostly it's because of all of you welcoming us into your homes every week. For that, we thank you!

Until next time...

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mxPlay 1.0.0 Released

Miro Kropacek has announced:

I wish you merry (post-)christmas time. We've got great news for you, there's new audio media player! It's not just some simple replay routine but full-featured player comparable to famous XMMS or Winamp. And for your Atari!

Main features:
- modern user interface
- fully skinable GUI
- compatible from the simple TOS to the latest XaAES
- best d&d / va-start / long name support you've ever seen
- memory protection friendly
- multitasking support, windowed dialogs
- universal plugin API which allows you to take any kind of replay routine and to adapt it to mxPlay
- it's free!

- open development, anyone can contribute / bugfix
- recursive directory/file adding with auto-detection for supported formats
- and a lot of more ...

You can download it from sourceforge.net area (follow link below) or take a look at http://atari.sk. Some "normal" home page is on the way, we're really busy so be patient... after this step will atari.org registration follow. Just for your information, the homepage will be at mxplay.sourceforge.net and mxplay.atari.org, respectively.

Once again, all the best and we're looking for your comments!

Greetings,

Miro Kropacek, mxPlay maintainer

URL: http://sourceforge.net/projects/mxplay

STYMulator v0.1

gRzEnIu has announced:

Grzegorz Tomasz Stanczyk aka gRzEnIu has released a STYMulator. STYMulator is a new chip music player for GNU/Linux. It's based on ST-Sound GPL Library so supports YM music format dumped from ATARI 16-bit machines.

URL: http://atariarea.krap.pl/stymulator/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, we're into the new year now, and I can't help but wonder what the next twelve months will bring. It seems that it's big ideas that change everything that come out of nowhere and smack us right between the eyes when we least expect it.

This is more than a 12 month span, but who could have predicted affordable mobile phones that take pictures and surf the 'net? How about multi-gigabyte solid-state hard drives that fit on a keychain? Global positioning devices? Satellite radio, digital video recorders?

I remember my computer science professor saying that computers would never be able to reproduce natural-sounding music because of the nature of the waveform of digital sound. It's a square wave, as opposed to

natural, analog sound waves, which follow a nice, curving form.

Now, to be fair, back then (in 1980), the state of the art in personal computer technology was the Apple][.

I wonder what good ol' Professor Manross thinks of the iPod and MP3 files! <grin>

Well, let's get to the news. hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Phantom asks about software compatibility for the CT60/63:

"I have been pondering over to get a CT63 or not.

I have 2 CT2B Falcons that work great and have no hardware/software compatibility problems with the stuff I use.

I also have several Falcons that are fairly stock including a SONO VISTA that I just acquired.

The speed of the CT2B is fast enough for what I do. And is very Compatible.

Although Rendering Images and 3D stuff would go faster with a CT63 if the software is compatible.

My questions goes to the owners of a working CT60/CT63.

I'd like to know how much software is compatible.

Generally, I use most of the major Graphics/Animation software, D2D Recording software, DTP, and Net Software, SCAN X for Color Flatbed Scanners and the ColorBurst HandScanner. Cubase Audio Falcon, Emagics LOGIC Atari with UNITOR II and LOG 3.

Apex Media, True Image/Paint, Rainbow Multimedia 2, all the Lexicor Software, such as Chronos 3D, Phoenix 2.0, and etc. Also VideoMaster Falcon cartridge and software. Positive Image, are some that I use most and need to know if these work. Also VIDI ST 12 and software.

Especially Apex Media, and VideoMaster Falcon software and Cartridge. CUBASE Audio Falcon v.2.06 and EMAGICS Logic Atari with the cartridges for SMPTE and extra MIDI support.

I am also interested to know if the extra memory can be used to record Music and Sound to, with programs such as SAM, Cubase and others.

I'd like to hear from owners of a CT60/63 and the software that they use without problems in accelerated mode.

Also any software that doesn't work or has some problems running in accelerated mode.

This will help me decide if a CT63 is right for me."

'Mike' tells Phantom:

"As far as I know,with a CT 60 the fast Ram won't necessarily help with digital audio recording. Most of the audio programs are set up for ST Ram. I would say the exception is if you set up your fastram as a Ram disk, then I know that Zero X will record to the Ram disk as if it was an actual hard drive.Cubase audio won't do this its very restrictive as to the kind of HD it records to. I.E. Scsi! I don't know if other audio programs would do this. The problem is finding a Ram disk program that will take advantage of the "massive" amounts of memory available with a CT60.

The one program that is amazingly fast and really speeds up disk operations is True Disk which was a freeware program. It has been updated to take advantage of extra memory but that version is unavailable from the author. Too bad as I have 500 megs of memory! I would venture to say that its probably not worth it to convert the CT2B Falcons to stock and then to CT60. How many Falcons do you have anyway???

I think most of the programs you have would be compatible with CT60 and you would probably notice a big speed increase. You would have to be careful as the bus speed is increased with a CT2b but the same bus increase requires some extra installation work with a CT60. This bus acceleration with a CT60 may cause some problems with Digital audio. And then there is the screen res. Without the videl acceleration you may not get the same screen res you can get with a CTB2. On the other hand, there are 2 models of video cards in the pipeline. check out Czuba's website for a list of compatible programs.Also the Dead Hackers site has an extensive bulletin board for CT60 users. I know Emagic Logic (midi) works and its very fast. If I had a couple of stock Falcons lying around I would definitely go for a CT63, especially if it includes the clock module and a Rev 6 060, some of the bugs are worked out and the firmware is all up to date. That's my 2 cents."

Rodolphe Czuba adds:

"Yes, sure, CT63 includes the CTCM and the 060 Rev.6 at 95 MHz minimum.

But only 9 cards still available (not reserved).
The boards are actually assembled in the factory...

I do not think I will produce a new run after...

Maybe the last chance to get one..

This afternoon a french guys came to see me at my house with a falcon mb to repair and he had already (8 months ago !) reserved one CT63.
He paid me cash for 2 others CT63 because he has 4 falcon at home !

About software, I can say that the CT60/63 is at least equal to or maybe more compatible than CT2, because of some bad design on CT2 (like TT-RAM not at the $01000000 address (need to use the PMMU and it is not 'transparent' with some programs) and the DSP IRQ that is not connected...)

There is a list of tested software and games on my web site !

About TT-RAM (SDRAM), Cubase use it a bit !! In fact You cannot flag Prog RAM in the FILE INFO CPX because it will not run correctly (no crash) because the AUDIO SDMA BUFFER is chained to the CODE of the software---> if you let the cubase audio to load into SDRAM, the buffer is into SDRAM and SDMA chip is not able (like blitter) to reach the SDRAM to rtransfer audio or read audio...the result is that cubase audio run VERY FAST, but you hear nothing on the AUDIO circuit !

BUT you can flag the other part of TT-RAM : the DATA MEMORY...and Cubase uses it ...and you run really faster on some operations.
Note that this flag configuration was/is the same possible with CT2..."

Phantom now asks about recording to SCSI tape drives:

"Got a question about using SCSI Tape Drives on a fairly Stock Falcon to do Direct to Tape recording.

Using HD Driver, will this work with most SCSI Tape Drives?

I have a HP Tape Drive, that has been used for storage on an Atari.

Would it be reliable to record Music to it? Thoughts?"

Dr. Uwe Seimet tells Phantom:

"It should work, but you need a SCSI tape (DAT?) driver. HDDRIVER provides the SCSI driver, but just like with CD-ROM drives you need a device-specific driver to make use of this interface."

Phantom replies to Uwe:

"I was told that it was used on a Atari system before.

Anyway, Does ExtenDos support SCSI Tape Drives?

I use it for CDROM/CDR drives. Never checked on Tape support.

I know that Syquest Drives and the like suppose to work.
I Remember someone posting about using Tape Drives on the Falcon before.

If anyone is using a SCSI Tape Drive on a Falcon or other Atari, Post what software you are using and the type of drive.

I think it will work. But I am not sure if the writing speed to Tape would be Fast enough to do Direct to Tape Recording.

It would help if someone knows how fast a SCSI Device must be to keep up with Direct to SCSI Device Recording.

Copying files over to tape wouldn’t be a problem.

However, when Recording a Live Song or Track I’m not sure if a Tape System would be as fast as a Hard Drive when

writing. A Buffer may help if it doesn't cause any loss of sound quality.

I know the Falcons SCSI system isn't a speed Demon compared to the latest Computers.

What I have is a HP SCSI Tape Drive. It's a 3.5 Drive IIRC. It uses very small Tapes. Around the size of a small Match Box.

The Tapes are still being made AFAIK and I have a lot of them already. If I can't use it to do Direct to Tape recording, then I'd at least like to use it to store completed Song Tracks. Or for software backups and etc. Info anyone?"

Uwe tells Phantom:

"But not without a device-specific driver. Fact is that for each SCSI device you need a specific driver in order to access it. You cannot access a tape drive with a CD-ROM driver or a hard disk driver, *unless* this device reports itself as a CD-ROM or hard disk device and implements the same SCSI commands as these devices. But SCSI tape devices do not do that because they are SCSI devices of their own, with a special command set. This is why you need special drivers also under Linux, for instance.
GEMAR by Steffen Engel ia a driver for SCSI tapes for the Atari. I think it is shareware, you may find it on some ftp servers.

Note that a tape drive may rewind the tape while recording, which is bad for direct audio recording."

Steve Adam adds his experiences:

"I wrote my own backup/restore software to access a QIC-150 SCSI tape drive. It works quite well, though it's perhaps a little under-documented. If you have the capability of compiling the source without asking me *too* many questions, then you're welcome to the source."

Paul Williamson asks about running Cubase on a CT60:

"Does anyone know if Cubase (midi not audio) runs on a CT60 Falcon ?"

'Dylan' tells Paul:

"I have a legit version of Cubase 3 (midi) and I will test it on my CT60 in the next few days. CAF works great at 90mhz!"

Rodolphe Czuba adds:

"Sure it runs !

I have at least 30 people who bought CT60 FOR CUBASE AUDIO !! So, if there would be a problem they would have told it to me, no ???"

Paul replies to Rodolphe:

"I am sure they would - but I am not talking about Cubase AUDIO.

Cubase AUDIO is NOT the same prg as Cubase MIDI. (Although Cubase Audio has MIDI functions within it.)

Cubase MIDI is also known not to be "cleanly" programmed, and has some known problems. For instance, when it runs on my Hades, it prevents access to the SCSI port. It also has a problem if there is too much ST ram available.

So, whilst I know Cubase AUDIO runs fine, I was looking for confirmation that Cubase MIDI also runs well. (I have been told that now.)"

Djuro Pucaric tells Paul simply:

"It does..."

Dennis Bishop asks about a clock battery for his TT:

"Took out the long dead battery today and no, radio shack doesn't have anything the same voltage. Closest battery is a 3.0 one. I was wondering if a pack of 2 or 4 AA or AAA batteries would work?"

Rory McMahon tells Dennis:

"You could check a local Fry's electronics and pay about $16 US for these or....

Here is a link that I ordered some batteries from a while back.

http://sescodatasystems.com/product_372_detailed.html

Be advised, thanks to homeland security, all batteries must go ground. Be prepared to wait up to a week for delivery.

I've also used 3 or 4 AA batteries with good results. I usually put 3 in series or if i have 4 put one in parallel with one of the 3. If you use rechargables, they will get you pretty close to 3.6 volts.

Even for those whose battery has not expired, you should replace them at least every couple years. I've had one explode in my TT and it make one H3LL of a mess. Luckily I was able to clean it up and the TT still works like a champ. The only damage was to the back metal plate which I neutralized the battery acid and wire brushed the metal. If possible, mount the battery outside the computer.

You will know when and if your battery explodes... It has an awful nasty smell like something is burning..."

Jim DeClercq adds:

"If anyone cares, all TT use the same timekeeping chip, and several different OEM batteries.

The last time I looked up that chip, any voltage greater than 3 volts, and less than 5.00 volts will work. The top limit is a function of the circuit they are in. Over 5.125 volts may cause fatal damage.

So there are several different ways to power that chip. For mine, the batteries come from DigiKey, and arrive in three or four days."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Dell Readies Gaming PC?!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Dell Readies Renegade Gaming PC

Attempting to steal some thunder from Microsoft's Xbox 360 gaming console, Dell Chairman Michael Dell launched a new, graphics-intensive PC built especially for computer gaming at the International Consumer Electronics Show here.

In a keynote address at the show, Dell introduced the XPS 600 Renegade, a colorfully airbrushed box containing four graphics processing units (GPUs) and other advanced technology to maximize PC gamers' experience to an "extreme" degree, Dell said.

The XPS 600 Renegade can provide "three times the resolution of the Xbox high-definition games," he said. The hardware surface of the new PC also has been airbrushed with a lavish design by artist Michael Lavallee, Dell said.

The XPS 600 Renegade is a new version of the current XPS 600, which already is one of the leading PCs for gamers on the market, according to Dell.

Dell said that 40 percent of PC users are gamers, and providing the best possible experience possible is important in competing for gamers' attention against popular gaming consoles such as the Xbox. He said the PC

is becoming the "center of the home entertainment experience."

The XPS 600 Renegade will be available during spring in the U.S., which is generally considered March to June.

Also during the keynote, Dell introduced a new monitor, the Dell UltraSharp 30-inch Monitor. Additionally, Alex Gruzen, senior vice president of Dell's product group, appeared on stage to show off a new concept notebook the company is considering for production. The notebook has a 20-inch screen and an integrated handle for easy carrying.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

File-Sharing Barons Face Day of Reckoning

Weeks before the original Napster shut down for good in 2001, Internet users were flocking to alternative song-swapping programs. Nearly 20 million people used Morpheus in its first four months, for example, to trade music and other files for free online. But the man behind Morpheus was worried. Michael Weiss figured popularity could bring its own perils.

As he feared, the notoriety led Hollywood studios and recording companies to sue Weiss' StreamCast Inc. for copyright infringement. It was part of the entertainment industry's wider effort to contain Morpheus and other Napster clones such as Kazaa and Grokster from taking up where Napster left off.

Now, like Napster founder Shawn Fanning before them, Weiss and other file-sharing barons are facing their own day of reckoning after a landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision last summer.

Over the last four months, several Napster heirs have shut down and others are contemplating what they once couldn't abide - doing business by the entertainment industry's rules to survive.

"We can take a look at another four years of legal battles and spending millions of dollars on both sides, (but) is that where I want to spend the next four years of my life?" said Weiss, 53. "It's better to focus the company's energy on creating new technologies."

StreamCast hasn't shut down Morpheus, but the company recently approached the entertainment industry to pursue talks about settling a lawsuit against the company, according to court documents.

Wayne Rosso, who built a reputation criticizing the recording industry as head of Grokster Ltd., is also pursuing a decidedly more cordial relationship with music labels as he prepares to launch a copyright-friendly file-sharing service.

"It’s pretty clear who won," Rosso said. "We always knew that this free trading of all this copyright material couldn’t go on. It just wouldn’t work."

Such capitulation was once unheard of among the file-sharing operators who lobbied against Hollywood and the recording industry. They billed themselves as defenders of technological innovation who shouldn’t be held liable because some people used their software for piracy.

But the high court’s ruling in June opened file-sharing operators to potential liability - something the entertainment industry underscored when it sent notices to seven file-sharing software operators in September warning them to shut down or prepare for court.

Companies behind once-popular file-swapping programs like i2hub and WinMX shut down after receiving the notice. LimeWire, BearShare and others also put on notice have yet to make their decisions public.

Separately, an Australian court ordered Sharman Networks Ltd., which distributes Kazaa, to ensure that new versions of the software filter out unlicensed copyright material.

Still, the amount of file-sharing has continued to increase since the days of Napster, and that’s not likely to change much, said Eric Garland, chief executive of BigChampagne LLC, which tracks activity on file-sharing networks.

"These Web sites and these businesses were shut down but it doesn’t shut down the software, it doesn’t shut down the (file-sharing) networks," Garland said. "The open-source community will continue to build new, uncensored versions."

Mitch Bainwol, head of the music industry trade group Recording Industry Association of America, concedes some file-sharers will find other means of obtaining pirated music online.

"There will always be new technological challenges," Bainwol said.

But he noted a sea change since Napster fell: Propelled by the success of Apple Computer Inc.’s iTunes Music Store, young music fans now have more legal options for obtaining music in digital form than they did back in 2001.

Ultimately, the entertainment companies are banking that the new-look file-swapping services that emerge from the ashes of Napster’s heirs will draw computer users away from illegal services. To persevere, file-sharing providers that seek to steer clear of copyright lawsuits will have to hope for the same.

"I don’t think anybody wants to see a replay of what happened to the entertainment industry when Napster shut down," Weiss said. "The company or companies that find the most effective method for transforming downloaders into consumers will be the biggest winners in 2006."

So far, iMesh has been the only to complete the transition from being sued by the recording industry to relaunching as a new service with the music labels’ seal of approval. But others are hoping to follow.

Rosso’s new industry-blessed file-sharing venture, Mashboxx, has been in the works for more than a year and is now expected to launch in early 2006.

Grokster settled its long-running copyright lawsuit for $50 million and is slated to re-emerge as a licensed service, while executives at MetaMachine Inc.’s eDonkey have also opted to transform.

"We’re going to go legit," said chief executive Sam Yagan. "The eDonkey of the future will be very much different from what it has been and will be largely dictated by what the recording industry wants."

Rosso, Weiss and other file-sharing proponents insist that over the years, they have sought the recording industry’s blessing in one form or another. But such offers were often rejected by major labels that saw the unfettered sharing of their artists’ songs as unacceptable.

"We were always in the background trying to get licenses and in those days we would get one of two responses - either, ‘We’re not going to reward pirates,’ or ‘Shut down and we’ll talk about it,’" Rosso said.

Still, despite millions of dollars in legal costs and often public acrimony between music companies and file-sharing executives, people on both sides are playing up the spirit of cooperation.

"For most of the participants in this drama, this isn’t about personal relationships. It’s about our ability to sustain a marketplace," Bainwol said. "Those folks that are helping to power this transition are doing the right thing."

File-Sharing Web Sites Going Legit

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White House Says Web Site Counts Visitors

The White House said Friday its Web tracking technology is consistent with federal rules because it only counts the number of visitors anonymously and doesn't record personal information.

The White House's site uses what's known as a Web bug - a tiny graphic image that's virtually invisible - to anonymously keep track of the number and time of visits. The bug is sent by a server maintained by an outside contractor, WebTrends Inc., and lets the traffic-analysis company know that another person has visited a specific page on the site.

Web bugs themselves are not prohibited. However, under a directive from the White House's Office of Management and Budget, they are largely banned at government sites when linked to cookies, which are data files that let a site track Web visitors.

Cookies are not generated simply by visiting the White House site. Rather, WebTrends cookies are sometimes created when visiting other WebTrends clients. An analysis by security researcher Richard M. Smith shows such preexisting cookies have then been read when users visit the White House site.

The discovery and subsequent inquiries by The Associated Press prompted the White House to investigate. David Almacy, the White House's Internet director, said tests conducted since Thursday show that data from the cookie and the bug are not mixed - and thus the 2003 guidelines weren't violated.

"The White House Web site is and always has been consistent with the OMB guidance," Almacy said, adding that the limited tracking is common among Web sites.

Jason Palmer, vice president of products for Portland, Ore.-based WebTrends, said Web browsers are designed to scan preexisting cookies automatically, but he insisted the company doesn't use the information to track visitors to the White House site.

Smith said the White House and WebTrends could have avoided any appearance of a problem by simply renaming the server used at WebTrends.

The Clinton administration first issued the strict rules on cookies in 2000 after its Office of National Drug Control Policy, through a contractor, had used the technology to track computer users viewing its online anti-drug advertising. The rules were updated in 2003 by the Bush administration.

Nonetheless, agencies occasionally violate the rules - inadvertently, they contend. The CIA did in 2002, and the NSA more recently. The NSA disabled the cookies this week and blamed a recent upgrade to software that shipped with cookie settings already on.

Florida Slaps Spammer with $11 Billion Fine

CIS Internet Services, a Clinton, Iowa-based Internet service provider, has been awarded $11.2 billion in a court judgment against a Florida man who sent millions of unsolicited pieces of commercial e-mail.

Robert W. Kramer, III, the owner and operator of CIS Internet Services, filed a lawsuit against Miami, Florida-based James McCalla, alleging that over 280 million illegal spam e-mails were sent to CIS e-mail accounts.

The spam e-mails allegedly advertised mortgages, debt-consolidation services, and pornographic and gambling Web sites.

The judgment comes nearly two years after Kramer first filed his lawsuit against McCalla and other alleged spammers. In addition to slapping the spammer with a record fine, the judgment issued by U.S. District Judge Charles R. Wolle on December 23, 2005, prohibits McCalla from accessing the Internet for three years.

Last year, another lawsuit by Kramer resulted in a judgment imposing a fine of $1 billion against three other spammers. "This latest judgment is the largest judgment against a spammer, eclipsing Kramer's previous combined judgment by an order of magnitude," Kramer wrote in a statement issued to the press.

"The amount that this spammer (McCalla) has been fined is quite staggering, and is bound to raise some eyebrows," said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant at security firm Sophos. "The size of the fine was determined on

the basis of $10 per spam e-mail, but it’s a certainty that the fine will never actually be paid."

However, Kramer said he intends to take the spammers for every penny they have. "I will seek the economic equivalent of the death penalty," he said in a telephone call. "Otherwise, it would have been crazy to have spent all this money to get a judgment."

Cluley said that successful convictions like the fine against McCalla help send a clear message to other spammers that spamming will not be tolerated. "For that reason, this sentence should be welcomed," he said.

"However, the unfortunate truth is that spam is a lucrative global business, driven by criminal intent, and well beyond the ability of the lawmakers to control," he noted. "Individuals and corporations who do not take proactive measures to protect themselves from the onslaught are certain to fall victim to the detrimental effects of spam in one form or another."

If no one bought goods sold via spam, the problem of unsolicited commercial e-mail would disappear overnight, Cluley argued.

Microsoft Prepares Patch for Windows Flaw

Microsoft Corp. says it will be at least a week before it issues a fix to a recently discovered vulnerability that could let an attacker take control of an Internet-connected computer.

Microsoft said Tuesday it has created a patch for the flaw in its Windows operating system but needs to test it first. The software giant said it hopes to release the patch as part of its regular monthly security updates next Tuesday.

The Redmond company confirmed late last week that some people were trying to take advantage of a flaw in an element of Windows that is used to view images. If a user is tricked into viewing an image, such as on a malicious Web site or within an e-mail attachment, that person’s computer could be attacked.

Microsoft said Tuesday that its research indicates the attacks are not widespread. The fact that the vulnerability requires a person to take action - say, opening an e-mail from a stranger - could mitigate the potential damage.

But Marc Maiffret, an executive with eEye Digital Security Inc. of Aliso Viejo, Calif., said the vulnerability still could be troubling because personal firewalls will offer little protection and the attacks can easily be modified to get around security software such as antivirus programs.

Another concern is that the flaw affects versions of Windows desktop and server software dating back to Windows 98.

"It’s basically almost any Windows PC right now that you can compromise if you can trick a person to going to the wrong Web site or opening the wrong e-mail," Maiffret said.

While it tests a fix, Microsoft is offering some technical options for

decreasing the risk of an exploit. Security experts say the flaw also reinforces the importance of not opening e-mails from strangers or visiting suspect Web sites.

Opera Expands Into Entertainment

Norwegian Web browser company Opera Software hopes to plug into the home entertainment market with the launch of a new browser designed for TVs, set-top boxes, and other consumer electronic devices.

Opera 8.5 for Devices, based on the company's core Web browser technology for desktop computers and mobile phones, uses Extensible Rendering Architecture to reformat Internet pages to suit any screen size, from 2-inch LCDs to large 16:9-ratio flat-panel TVs. The new version also has what the company calls a "spatial navigation system," which will let users easily navigate pages with any input device.

Industria, an Icelandic provider of broadband systems and integration services, will use the browser technology in its new IPTV (Internet Protocol television) software offering called Zignal, Opera says.

Sigma Designs, which specializes in system-on-chip technology, also plans to pre-port the new browser software in its SMP8630 family of chip sets, Opera said in a separate announcement Thursday.

The new Opera software includes the company's TV Rendering technology, which makes the necessary adjustments to display any Web page on any TV screen, according to information on Opera's Web site. The technology focuses on pixelation and problematic colors, adapting different elements individually to suit the TV screen, the company says. The original fonts, colors, design, and style are left virtually untouched.

The Opera software also enables the use of Web technologies such as Ajax (Asynchronous JavaScript and XML) to create advanced applications and dynamic user interfaces, the company says.

Opera 8.5 for Devices is available for evaluation for commercial products at Opera.com.

More Than 300 Exhibitors Expected at Macworld Expo

IDG World Expo on Thursday noted that more than 300 exhibitors are expected to show products at next week's Macworld Conference & Expo in San Francisco,Calif, a marked increase over 2005. The company also provided details about some of the event highlights next week.

The increase in exhibitors would seem to be a sign of growth both in the Mac market and the burgeoning iPod acccessory market. Last year's Macworld Expo San Francisco saw 275 vendors exhibit. That was a 10 percent year over year uptick compared to 2004. This year's growth is even bigger, with closer to 350 vendors signed up for the show, Macworld has learned.

It's gonna be packed, said Mike Sponseller, public relations manager for IDG World Expo.

The event kicks off Monday with Power Tools conference sessions, but for so many attendees and Mac enthusiasts who keep an eye on the event happenings, it doesn't really get started until Apple CEO Steve Jobs keynote at 9:00 AM Pacific Time on Tuesday, January 10, 2005. At 11:00 AM the doors are scheduled to open. The event runs through Friday, January 13, 2005.

Featured presentations open to all attendees include David Pogue's Macworld talk show, info on podcasting, George Lucas revolution in filmmaking and new features in Photoshop CS.

The Macworld Auto Show is a new Exhibit Hall attraction that features a number of cars customized with Mac integration and iPod docks, including a Volkswagen GTi, Porsche Cayenne, vintage Buick Riviera and more. The John Lennon Educational Tour Bus will give users a look at the state of the art in mobile recording and multimedia production.

Fifteen Power Tools conferences covering the gamut of creative professional work on the Macintosh, a new feature called Market Symposiums, set up to help small businss owners, educators, art directors and others.

Other features include the new Creative Corner in the Exhibit Hall, highlighting music and audio technology, digital photography and more, the Berklee Dream Studio, created by the Berklee College of Music and more.

Another Sober Worm Set to Strike

The next variant of the Sober worm is set to attack computers already infected by previous versions of the malware. The new attack will occur at the stroke of midnight GMT as January 5 turns into January 6, according to European antivirus software vendors. Since Internet service providers and local police are closely monitoring Web sites likely to be used in the attack, security experts believe that the hacker may choose not to engage in any malicious activity this time around.

"Nothing's posted yet [on the Web sites]," says Carole Theriault, senior security consultant with Sophos PLC in the United Kingdom. "It's possible he may stay well clear." Mikko Hypponen, chief research officer for F-Secure in Finland, agrees with Theriault. "It's more likely he'll lay low than engage in activation," Hypponen said in a phone interview Wednesday. Nevertheless, the companies and their peers around the world are keeping a close eye on the situation in case the hacker does choose to launch an attack.

The last major Sober attack, Sober-Z, occurred in late November. At one point, approximately one in every fourteen e-mail messages on the Internet carried it, according to Sophos.

Previous Sober variants have turned users' computers into "spam machines," spewing out right-wing German propaganda, according to Theriault. The upcoming attack could be something that "makes a big song and dance on machines or something very subtle," she says. Hypponen warns that with all the interest centering on the likely timing of the attack, the hacker may forgo any malicious activity until the attention dies down.

Sober worm variants have been written in both German and English. The German propaganda spreads only to e-mail inboxes that have a.de address

while remaining "invisible to the rest of the world," Hypponen says. Though most hackers produce malware for monetary benefit, the Sober author seems interested in only two things - working toward a future attack and releasing propaganda - according to Hypponen.

Many previous Sober variants have spread via e-mail messages purporting to be from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, or other law enforcement agencies, or in messages claiming to offer video clips of Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie, stars of The Simple Life, a U.S. reality TV show. After malicious code in an attachment is executed, the worm spreads by sending itself to other e-mail addresses contained on the infected PC.

The best way to protect yourself against an attack is with antivirus software, according to the experts. "If you don't have antivirus, get some," Theriault says. "If you have some, ensure it's up to date and clean up your computer." Hypponen stresses that users must double-check that their antivirus software is running and receiving regular updates. He points out that many worms - not just Sober - switch off both antivirus and firewall protection when they attack computers.

Hypponen doesn't expect authorities to catch the hacker - whom he refers to as "a lone gunman" and thinks is probably a resident of Germany or Austria - this time around. During November's Sober-Z attack, authorities had much the same information they have now regarding the Web sites the hacker was most likely to go to, but he escaped detection. "He's been playing a game of cat and mouse [with the authorities] for over two years," Hypponen says. "I really do hope they'll be able to track him down."

Back in December, iDefense broke the encrypted code in a variant of the Sober worm and discovered that January 5, 2006, was the date set for the variant to download unknown pieces of code from various Web addresses. The date coincides with the 87th anniversary of the founding of the precursor to the Nazi Party.

Hypponen notes that initial reports about the exact timing of the attack put it during January 5 GMT, but F-Secure researchers subsequently double-checked the date and found that, according to the Sober code, activation of any malware is due to occur after January 5.

Web Services Thrive, But Outages Outrage Users

Web sites that share blogs, bookmarks and photos exploded in popularity in 2005, but in recent weeks a number of major outages left users stranded and frustrated.

The new breed of Web site includes blogging services such as TypePad, the photo site Flickr, the shared bookmark site del.icio.us and many others. They are sometimes known collectively as "Web 2.0": hosted online, relying heavily on users' submissions, and frequently updated and tweaked by their owners.

Their growth in the last year has been huge. Flickr and del.icio.us were high-profile acquisitions for Internet giant Yahoo, and there are now at least 20 million blogs in existence, according to some estimates, with tens of thousands being added every day.

But the surge in Web-based applications hasn’t come without some serious hiccups as several notable services have crashed.

Six Apart, whose TypePad service is used by many high-profile bloggers, experienced nearly an entire day of downtime on December 16, when it suffered a hardware failure. Del.icio.us had a major power failure on December 14. Services including Bloglines, Feedster and WordPress have also experienced problems.

Nothing underlines the importance of these "social media" services as much as the outcry of users when the sites crash. While the services were usually back up and running within a few days at most, the outages prompted much consternation from users who were temporarily unable to share their blogs and bookmarks with the world.

Russell Buckley and Carlo Longino wrote on their blog MobHappy (http://mobhappy.typepad.com/) that waiting for TypePad to be fixed was like "waiting for a train to arrive, when you’re sitting on a cold, damp platform. It’s mildly irritating for the first 5 minutes, but then annoyance levels start to rise exponentially."

"TypePad has been growing so rapidly that it is finding the hard way that scale and scalability matter," Business 2.0 technology writer Om Malik wrote on his blog (http://gigaom.com/). "Are they the only ones? Not really - over (the) past few days Bloglines, Feedster and Wordpress.com have been behaving like a temperamental 3-year-old."

The usefulness of Web 2.0 services - which also include the collaborative Web pages known as Wikis and RSS feeds that deliver customized information to users - is highlighted when they are abruptly taken away.

"You need those services to be ’on.’ I have come to expect 99.9 percent uptime, and when a service crashes there is significant frustration," said David Boxer, director of instructional technology and research at the Windward School in Los Angeles, where he runs workshops on subjects like podcasting and photoblogging.

"When those services go down, then we are stuck in a ditch," he said.

Boxer’s students have worked on projects aimed at making them "citizen journalists" via publishing their own blogs, podcasts, documentaries and photo essays. But when those services suffer outages, everything grinds to a halt.

When the Blogger Web site went down, Boxer’s students lost some of their work. And when del.icio.us crashed recently, "it left me personally in a lurch," he said.

"I knew that eventually a machine or software application will crash, but I always expect a third-party provider like del.icio.us will build enough redundancy into the infrastructure that it will never go down," Boxer said.

It is still early days for Web 2.0, and some of the recent difficulties are likely just teething problems as companies adapt to their new popularity. However, the outages may make it harder to convince businesses and investors that blogging is ready for primetime.

Boxer, for one, is willing to ride out a few outages to take advantage of the new services.

"They allow for elements of personalization, content delivery and information pushing unlike any previous incarnation of the Net," he said.

Schools Ask Parents to Pay Up Before Kids Log On

Heather Sutherland was excited to learn her public school system was using laptop computers to teach elementary students such as her daughter. Until, that is, she found out parents were expected to pay the nearly $1,500 cost.

"I said, ’What? You must be joking,’ " Sutherland says. "I think it’s unfair that the (school district) is requiring us to ’pay to learn.’ "

The public school system in this quiet city 27 miles southeast of Los Angeles is pushing the frontiers of computer technology in the classroom with a program that puts a laptop computer into the backpacks of children as early as first grade. It is pushing the boundaries of financing, too, by asking parents to pay $500 a year for three years so each of more than 2,000 elementary and middle school children can have their own Apple iBook G4 laptop.

An increasing number of school systems are using computers in the core curriculum of early grades. Don Knezek, CEO of the International Society for Technology in Education, a non-profit group in Washington, says one laptop per student is the hottest trend in educational computing.

But asking parents to pay for it isn’t.

"I can see where that issue raises concerns," he says. "I’m not aware of anyone else who has tried that."

The Fullerton program, at four of 20 district schools, has created a storm of controversy for the school system and its superintendent, Cameron McCune. It also has raised broader questions about how far public schools here and elsewhere can go in using costly technology in the face of tight school budgets and limited funding.

Some parents worry that whatever its educational benefits, the program has created an expensive burden for struggling families and has forged new divisions in the public schools.

Sutherland, who kept her 11-year-old daughter out of the program, is concerned that it creates "a horrible form of financial segregation."

"It’s mind-boggling that they would even suggest such a thing," Sutherland says.

Some parents say the financial expectations and price tag violate California’s constitutional guarantee of a free public education - a principle also in other state constitutions. The parents are threatening a lawsuit and have enlisted the help of the American Civil Liberties Union.

"The California constitution is very, very clear: My children attend a free public school," Sandra Dingess says.

Dingess moved three of her four children to another school within the district to avoid the big computer bill and what she says was the embarrassment her children faced from being unable to pay. Her fourth

child, an eighth-grader, remained in the program for a final year.

McCune, who created the program, acknowledges that his school system is trying something controversial, but he says lower-income families can get help paying for the computers. "In all four schools, nobody has been denied access because of a lack of ability to pay."

There are other concerns. Some parents say transferring to another school is not fair. Others object to requests for tax returns and financial records to obtain aid. "We don't think you have the right to ask for that information," Dingess says. "You're not the IRS. You're a public school."

Schools have come a long way in embracing technology in the past decade. More than 99% of public schools had Internet access by 2002, according to federal statistics. It is commonplace for even elementary classrooms to have one or more computers.

In high schools, computer labs with multiple machines allow students to research subjects and type up and print papers. The computers also let kids use Internet-based prep courses for college entrance exams such as the SAT and fill out online college applications, National PTA official Chuck Saylors says. "At the PTA, we would encourage technology in the classroom," says Saylors, of Greenville, S.C. "Whether you are (going to be) a food server in a restaurant or the CEO of a major corporation, every child that leaves school now, regardless of what they do in adult life, is going to have to have some knowledge of technology."

Well-stocked labs lessen pressure on parents to buy computers for their children, Saylors says, but "not every school district and not every family can have the resources to make that happen."

He says teachers, in assigning outside work, generally are sensitive to differing computer resources in their students' homes. In Greenville, he says, the school system has invited big employers to donate their used computers to the schools, which in turn lease them to the families of students for as little as $10 a year.

"We'd love to see computers in classrooms and in every home, but realistically that's almost impossible," Saylors says.

That brings up the issue of disparity in education.

Reg Weaver, president of the National Education Association union, which represents 2.7 million teachers, says the issue isn't computers but money.

"If there was (adequate) funding there, no kid would have to worry about whether or not their parents choose for them to have a computer," Weaver says.

Attempts in recent years to start similar programs with parents purchasing laptops were suspended in the face of controversy at a San Diego County school district and in Palo Alto, Calif. In the face of a potential suit, Fullerton's elected school board has halted plans to expand it to all sixth-graders next year and ordered a reassessment.

Students seem to like the brave new world, though what they're learning may not be so educational. In Fullerton, computers are used in all subjects and as much as 60% of the class work. Some of what they learn is how to e-mail friends and download music.

"It was fun to have around and to use for my own purposes," says Riley Hall, 13, who was in the program last year but transferred to another school for eighth grade. "But it didn't make school any better or more challenging. ... A lot of it at school was to show off what you know about computers."

In designing Fullerton's program, McCune points to Henrico County, Va., where 24,000 laptops have been put in the hands of high school and middle school students, and Maine, where 38,000 laptops have been provided to seventh- and eighth-graders. In both cases, the county or state provided the laptops. Parents weren't asked to lease or buy them.

Fullerton officials say their system can't afford that.

"Our problem here in California is we're underfunded so much, we just don't have the money to pay for it," school board member Minard Duncan says. "I don't blame the parents for objecting to paying for what we call free public education."

Online Shopping Hit New Highs in 2005

Holiday shoppers spent more online in 2005 than they did in 2004, continuing to steadily steal market share from brick-and-mortar shops, according to a report released last week by Goldman Sachs, Nielsen/NetRatings, and Harris Interactive.

Holiday shoppers in the U.S. spent $30.1 billion from late October until December 23, a 30 percent increase over the 2004 holiday season, according to the report, which surveyed 8600 shoppers in the U.S.

Online spending made up 27 percent of total spending during the holidays, up from 16 percent four years ago.

Brick-and-mortar shops attracted 68 percent of holiday spending this year, down from 72 percent last year, the report found.

This was a good season for computer hardware and peripherals, with online sales in the sector growing 126 percent to $4.8 billion in spending. But clothes were still the most popular item bought online during the season, with spending reaching $5.3 billion on the segment, according to the report.

Consumers spent less online on toys and video games this year, with the category sinking 9 percent compared to 2004.

The study also found that consumer satisfaction with online shopping is slowly creeping up, with 64 percent of those surveyed saying they were satisfied with their experience, compared to 61 percent in 2004.

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